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Letter from

BIMONTHLY 3.50 FF

Letter from Taizé

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Graduate Theological Union

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May 1990



The European Meeting in Poland:

Europe: like on a weaver's loom.

"From the depths of my heart, I want to say thank you to the much-loved families of Wroclaw. During six days you have offered a welcome beyond compare. Through you, young people have seen the generosity of the Polish soul that is so moulded by the Gospel. Throughout Europe, we will follow the example of your hospitality." With these words, Brother Roger thanked the people of Wroclaw on the last day of the meeting.

Never before had so many families opened their doors for a European meeting. About one in every five families received young people, and once the 42,000 coming from outside the town had been housed, there were still places left! The warmth of this welcome in the hundred parishes of Wroclaw and the surrounding region, even including some villages, meant that the cold of the winter was forgotten.

The most important event in the meeting: the common prayers, which lent rhythm to the day, took place at the same time in seven large churches, two sport halls and four circus tents.

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1990 in Taizé
40 intercontinental
meetings
for young people

Each week from February
until mid-November.

A large presence of young
people from Eastern Europe and
the southern continents will
mark these meetings.

Holy Week and Easter: 9 - 15 April

For information and registration for the
intercontinental meetings, write to:
Meetings, F-71250 Taizé Community; tel
(00 33) 85 50 18 18

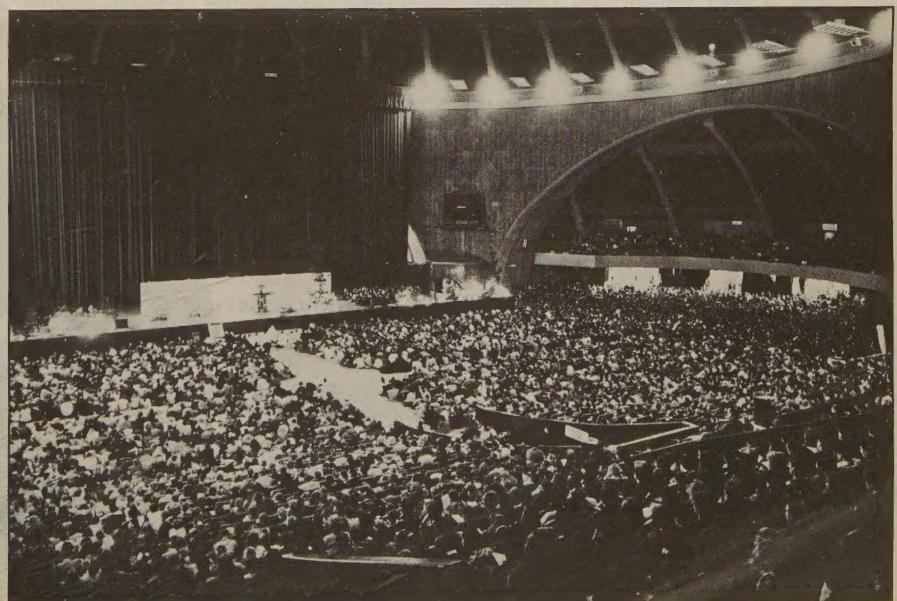
Everyone saw the most important part of the meeting in the common prayers which lent rhythm to the days. They were held, at the same time, in seven large churches, two sport halls and four circus tents. In each place, a small choir helped with the singing and readings followed one another in very different languages.

"The imposing concrete dome of the hall Hala Ludowa, built at the beginning of the century," wrote a French journalist, "rang out during six days with the prayers and the words of peace and reconciliation spoken by Brother Roger.

Invaded each day by more than 15,000 young people, this hall was one of the places of prayer. Between the prayers, there were meetings led by the brothers or by young people who spoke about their commitments. Outside, there were rows of tents set up for the meal distribution, with hot tea always available. During the whole time, a peaceful surge of multicoloured back-packs,

braving the freezing temperatures, gushed out into the streets of Wroclaw.

This industrial town, with streets greyed by coal dust, hides a heart of gold. Not only the families sprang into action, even the public administration helped. There were special tickets for public transport, extra trams, ten special trains every day to ferry young people to the surrounding towns and exemption from the mandatory currency exchange. Authorisation was given to use a radio link for the ten places of prayer. Even the army came to set up tents for the meal distribution and lent tarpaulins to cover the floors of the four huge circus tents. ▷



Sabine Nitzschke, Dresden



This was the first time that a "station" on the pilgrimage of trust on earth was held in Eastern Europe with the European meeting. This was a great intuition at the end of this year where the huge movement set in motion in Poland has drawn the countries of Eastern Europe towards democracy during these last months, eventually taking even Rumania with it. Brother Roger brought this to mind stressing the "vital rôle of trust, after years of mistrust, fear and violence, in order to build up Europe." The Polish prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the president of Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel, and the United Nations secretary-general, Javier Perez de Cuellar, and Pope John Paul II, all acknowledged this sign by sending messages of goodwill to the meeting.

From 1962 onwards, brothers of Taizé have visited Christians living on the other side of the Iron Curtain. The last meeting took place in Pécs, Hungary, last May. 20,000 young people participated. In Wroclaw, the large number of young people coming from Eastern Europe, representing about two-thirds of all the pilgrims taking part, characterised the meeting which was the largest ever organised by Taizé. It was the first time that many people had left their own country. "We learnt by word of mouth about this big European meeting. There was a great necessity for young Soviets to take part," explained Ludmilla, who lives near the Caspian Sea. 500 came from the different Soviet republics, 17,000 from Poland, 4,000 from Czechoslovakia, 3,000 from Hungary, 2,000 from Yugoslavia and 1,500 from East Germany.

The welcome in the families

Gosc w domu, Bog w domu» — "a guest in the house, means God in the house." The Archbishop of Wroclaw, Cardinal Gulbinowicz, quoted this saying in his words of welcome to the young people. All the town seemed to want to welcome. Outside the station, from the time of the first arrivals onwards, a huge banner from the Solidarity trade union read; "Solidarnosc welcomes Taizé."

The families resolved all the problems in order to make people welcome. To make room everyone squeezed up a little. Some people went to sleep at their neighbours' house. Some families received up to seven people in their tiny flats. "We're used to pilgrimages," they said. On the other hand, it was more difficult to resolve the language problems, but in order to communicate time was spent inventing a language using gestures, drawings and songs. Late into the evening, the families stayed up to give hot drinks and an abundance of cakes, despite their difficulty in finding even the basic necessities.

▲▲ The line of tents for the meal distribution and a constant supply of hot tea.

With no doubt, the best of what the families passed on was the witness they bore to simplicity and faith in daily life. Two traditional gestures on Christmas Eve, carried out in every Polish home, show this deep-rootedness in the faith. A place remains empty at the meal for the one who could unexpectedly arrive, and a piece of unleavened bread is shared with everyone, whilst good wishes are given for the New Year. This sign of communion was repeated in the parishes on New Year's Eve after the prayer for peace.

Renconciliation

Everyone was a pilgrim of trust, but more especially those coming from countries where mistrust, fear and lack of freedom had held the upper hand for so long. There were wonderful replies to the question "How can I be a bearer of trust?" from young people from Wroclaw involved in Solidarity, and from young Czechoslovaks and East Germans. Words which seemed too idealistic, such as "Love and truth are stronger than violence..." (used by the opposition in Czechoslovakia), suddenly became reality through the evidence of those who spoke them. Reconciliation was also lived out in a more hidden way: young Germans were welcomed by Polish families who had particularly suffered during the war.

"For me," writes Gerd from East Germany, "the meeting in Wroclaw has become like a wellspring. I see Europe as a loom upon which we are making cloth together. The weave is already there; each of our visits, each new contact, adds a thread. All these threads are of different colours because each of us is so different from the other, but together we are building a society based on love. The atmosphere of trust, openness and authenticity of the meeting did me a lot of good. There is still a great need to destroy the walls of misunderstanding and prejudice."

The words of Brother Roger during the first common prayer expressed well this appeal; "It is essential for the human family to enter into an era of trust and reconciliation... In 1989, many people have seen iron curtains come down, and, at the same time, walls of fear and humiliation fall... The youth of Western Europe, coming to Wroclaw, are filled with thankfulness. Here, they have been able to come together with the young people of Eastern Europe who give life to such a fine hope for the whole of Europe and who will continue to do so. The Poles have borne witness to love and reconciliation. They have maintained such a trust in the value and dignity of each human being."

Whether the songs were in Latin, Polish, or other languages, they rang out with the same intensity in the very different places of prayer; sport halls arranged into temporary churches, freezing cold Gothic churches, circus tents hardly heated, or modern churches.

Just after the meeting, young Poles told of their discoveries: "It has been an occasion for discovering the universality of the Church and for feeling the presence of the Risen One in our lives. Now we want to continue and live this out in our daily life."

"I liked the common prayers very much. Never before had I had such a strong experience. Now I am trying to change my attitude towards others as well."

"I had left prayer aside, but the meeting gave me a new desire to pray again. thanks to the meeting, I understood to what point I love God." "Despite language barriers, we lived a true communion in the prayer. We are used to pilgrimages, and the one which we have just lived through was above all interior and the most beautiful of all."

The prayer in the cathedral ▶

The prayer became even more intense when situations of suffering throughout the world were remembered, particularly in Rumania, like during the nightly prayer around the cross. For so many of those taking part, prayer was so essential for the reason that it had been at the source of the struggle for freedom. The simple gesture of holding a lighted candle in the hand recalled the demonstrations in Leipzig or Prague.

Commitment at home

This encounter with God through prayer gave courage to question oneself in a very radical way. One evening, Brother Roger asked; "Where can the vital strength be found in order to persevere right up until the end of Christ's call? Nothing paralyses our vital strength like routine and discouragements. So let us not be afraid of remaining, day after day, seekers of the wellsprings of faith and seekers of what makes the earth a place fit to live in." ▷

Prayer

Faithfulness in prayer impregnates the life of the Polish people. All the prayers reflected a common thirst for God; in the families, each morning in the local church communities, and above all, twice daily in the ten places of prayer.



Sabine Nitzschke, Dresden



Jacques Picot, Paris

...like a weaver's loom

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At each time of sharing, in the mornings or the afternoons, these questions were present, particularly during the last two days. On the Sunday afternoon, in over 20 different places, young people from Wroclaw belonging to the Solidarity trades union, and young people coming from other continents, spoke on the theme "Communion in Christ gives you the boldness for strong solidarity" from the letter "Wellsprings of Trust." On the last afternoon, the questions "How can we communicate faith and trust in God? How can we continue on a pilgrimage of trust?" were put.

One evening, Brother Roger spoke on the same theme, saying; "It is so important, as soon as you return home, to dare to risk communicating Christ to others... How could we let this astonishing moment in history, where freedom is being found again, pass us by?... These days, we have seen an intuition confirmed; Europe will be built through the trust coming from faith, which is so vital after these years of mistrust, fear and violence." This continuity is expressed like a kind of patch-work through all the European countries.

Without waiting, many people in Wroclaw itself wanted to continue a regular prayer: "Up until now, few of the initiatives came from the youth, but immediately after the meeting we started a prayer around the cross every Friday evening in our parish." And at the start of February, everyone was invited to a prayer in one of the large churches of the city centre, S. Maria na Piasku. Every month in this church, and in many other towns in Poland and elsewhere in Europe, people are invited to come together for common prayer. Young people from the southern continents were present in Wroclaw. They bore witness to their commitment and to the life of faith of their peoples. Their presence made people attentive to, as Brother Roger said, "not constructing Europe by isolating ourselves, but by building up the human family throughout the world." In order to allow young people from the other continents to continue coming to Taizé, and to go to local church communities to convey the freshness of their faith, European church communities help with the cost of their journey.

The intercontinental meetings at Taizé, which started in February, will permit a deepening in faith and dialogue with youth from every country. This year, for the first time, many will be able to come from East Germany, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union and Rumania. Everything is been done in Taizé so that the largest possible number of people can sleep in dormitory huts instead of tents. □

Listening to the CONTINENTS

Czechoslovakia

The gentle revolution

From a letter received from Prague at the beginning of January:

"Everyone, believers and non-believers, young people and those who are not so young, men and women, has deeply felt that this new energy which has changed everything does not come from us but from God! For the Church in particular, it has been a beautiful experience to see the action of God even beyond her frontiers.

In the beginning there was serious violence, but it was not in vain. What happened is comparable with the fall of Jericho in the Bible. During seven days people gathered together peacefully to march in the streets, lighting candles at the places where there had been violence, and on the seventh day the walls came tumbling down. Seeing the violence which shook Rumania, we were even more astonished by the strength of non-violence.

This strength in unity made us attentive to each other. Never before had our two nationalities, Czech and Slovak, been so close to each other. This feeling of strong solidarity was immediately made real when steps were taken to help Rumania.

Everyone is astonished to see our common desire for forgiveness and reconciliation. Those who have suffered most from the violence of the last years, who have just left prison, now take upon themselves the responsibilities of power.

They themselves say: "We have no desire for revenge. It is not because we have suffered more that we have more rights. Before all else, we want to forgive." During one of the big demonstrations, two policemen came to ask for forgiveness, and the whole crowd prayed together the Our Father.

The slogans of the revolution were not political. Such slogans included for example: "Love and truth are stronger than violence", "In trust and hope, may the truth be on our side."

We can even say that since the time of our revolution, many have understood that these words are not simply words. They have started to discover in them the wellsprings of faith in God, and to live them out in their own lives."

Meeting for the young people of Northern Europe

24 - 27 May 1990

Linköping, Sweden

For the first time, a stage of the Pilgrimage of trust will take place in the north of Europe, in Sweden. Young people from all the neighbouring countries, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Russia, the Baltic States, will be welcomed by the people of Linköping. The meeting starts on Ascension Day, Thursday 24th May, and ends on Sunday 27th May. In the morning, there will meetings in the parishes. Midday and evening prayers will be held in the cathedral.

"You will be welcomed at Linköping in the month of May, the time when the nature is at its most beautiful - like in Paradise. 900 years ago, brothers from this region of France, from Cluny, came to Sweden. They had received a letter from a queen who lived in the part of Sweden where Linköping is. They came and built churches. And now, you are going to come and repair these churches, the churches in people's hearts. These are the true churches. We welcome you to come and do this work."
(Bishop Martin of Linköping, during a visit to Taizé.)

Information and registration to participate in the meeting:

- Travel from BRITAIN: Boat to Gothenburg leaves Harwich, 23rd May at 14.45 returns 28th May at 16.00. Cheap "Seapex" return fare: £99 (has to be booked at least 4 weeks in advance), student reductions also available: Scandinavian Seaways, Scandinavia House, Parkstone Quay, Harwich, Essex, CO12 4QG. Tel: 0255 240240. Then coach or train to Linköping. All further information via Stephen & Jean Nicholson, 50 Beverley Close, Rainham, GILLINGHAM, Kent, ME8 9HQ Tel: 0634 364101.

- From OTHER COUNTRIES: Taizé Community, 71250 CLUNY, France. Tel: 85.50.18.18

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

1 Tue Ac 5.27-33
Jesus said: I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. **Jn 6.30-35**

2 Wed Jn 6.35-40
Glad to have had the honour of suffering for the name of Christ, the first disciples continued to teach and proclaim the good news of Christ Jesus, both in the temple and in people's homes. **Ac 5.34-42**

3 Thu Ac 7.51-8.1a
Jesus said: The words I say to you are not just my own, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing this work. **Jn 14.6-14**

4 Fri Ac 8.1-8
Seeing that many of his disciples were turning away, Jesus said to the Twelve, "What about you, do you want to go away too?" Peter answered, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life." **Jn 6.60-69**

5 Sat Ac 9.1-22
The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid: I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said he would." **Mt 28.1-10**

6 Sun Ac 2.14,36-41
Jesus said: I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. **Jn 10.1-10**

7 Mon 1 Co 15.1-8
Jesus said: I am the good shepherd. I have other sheep whom I must also lead. They too will listen to my voice, so there will be one flock and one shepherd. **Jn 10.11-18**

8 Tue Jn 10.22-30
As it was that death came through one man, so through one man has come the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. **1 Co 15.20-28**

9 Wed 1 Co 15.42-44
Jesus said: In truth, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains only a single grain. But if it dies it yields a big harvest. **Jn 12.20-26a**

10 Thu Jn 12.44-50
Paul writes: As we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the heavenly one. **1 Co 15.44-49**

Meditating on the Word

Johannine Hours
GENESIS 1-2, 4

Johannine hours are suggested as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer, in the midst of our life at home. During the course of the day take a couple of hours to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, the group (3 to 10 people) meet together to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

21 Mon Jn 15.26-16.4
Persevere in prayer, being watchful and thankful. **Col 4.2-6**

22 Tue Jn 16.5-7
Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. **Jm 5.13-16**

23 Wed Jn 16.12-15
Pray in the Spirit at all times. Never tire of praying for all God's people. **Ep 6.18-20**

24 Thu Ac 1.1-1 ; Ep.17-23
ASCENSION
Jesus, risen from the dead, appeared to his disciples and said: Go, make disciples of all nations. And surely I am with you always, to the end of time. **Mt 28.16-20**

25 Fri Ep 4.7-13
Jesus said to his disciples: Now you are sad, but I shall see you again and your hearts will be full of joy. And that joy no one shall take from you. **Jn 16.20-23**

26 Sat Lk 24.1-12
God is rich in merciful love. Because of the great love he has for us, he has brought us to life with Christ. **Ep 2.1-6**

27 Sun Ac 1.12-14
Jesus prayed to his Father for his disciples, saying: Keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one as we are one. **Jn 17.1-11**

28 Mon Jn 16.29-33
Come to Christ, the living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in God's sight. **1 P 2.4-6**

29 Tue Jn 17.11-19
Peter writes: Once you were not a people at all, and now you are the people of God. **1 P 2.9-10**

30 Wed 1 P 2.19-25
Jesus prayed for his disciples, saying: Father, may they all be one, just as you are in me and I am in you, so that they may also be in us and that the world may believe that you sent me. **Jn 17.20-26**

31 Thu 1 P 3.18-22
A third time, Jesus said to Peter, "Do you love me?" Peter was hurt that he asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" and said, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you." **Jn 21.15-19**

The writer of the first creation story in the book of Genesis did not lack audacity. He dared to assert, going against the ideas held in the surrounding regions, that one God alone had created all things. For Genesis, the sun and moon, the stars of the heavens, which were revered by other peoples as deities, are part of creation. A word of God called them into existence.

His boldness does not stop there. In the surrounding religions, the arrival of man upon earth signified a misfortune, the fall of a god. But in Genesis, there is no such conception. The human being is described as being in God's image, created by the deepest wish of the Creator, who rejoices in giving and sharing: "Let us make human beings in our image" (Gen. 1.26). This conviction leads our author to repeat "God saw that it was good" and he goes even further after the creation of human beings: "God saw that indeed it was very good". (Gen. 1.31).

Writing five or six centuries before Christ, the author could not ignore human suffering, neither that which is undergone nor that which is caused. However, it is important for him that his people meditate upon the wellspring from which everything sprang forth and upon the way in which God looks in trust and wonderment on the human adventure. We have here a story which shows of what surprising reactions faith is capable. What inner struggle was waged by the author of this text before handing it down to us, we are not told. The most striking messages of hope can often be written by those who have suffered and at first doubted.

Listening to this story today means letting ourselves be seized by this same trust of God. God says to each person: "Do you understand? You are part of my creation which is good. A unique goodness enters into the world through your existence.

● How can the first creation story help us to accept our life as a gift and something that is good? What helps us in this story in our struggle to overcome doubts and to believe?

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

Meditating on the Word

June

1 Fri Jn 21.20-25

Paul said: I do not place any value on my own life, provided that I complete the mission the Lord Jesus gave me — to bear witness to the good news of God's grace.

Ac 20.22-25

2 Sat Jn 7.37-39

The Lord says: I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity.

Jl 3.1-5

3 SUN Ac 2.1-11; 1 Co 12.3-13

PENTECOST
The Risen Christ breathed upon his disciples and said: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven.

Jn 20.19-23

4 Mon Mk 12.1-12

I will tell of the kindness of the Lord and of the many good things he has done for his people. God's Spirit guided them to rest.

Is 63.7, 10-14

5 Tue Mk 12.13-17

The Lord says: Be not afraid, my servant, you whom I have chosen. For I shall pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I shall pour out my Spirit upon you.

Is 44.1-5

6 Wed Mk 12.26-27

The Lord says: I have given you my Spirit. My words that I have put in your mouth will not leave you from this time on and forever.

Is 59.19-21

7 Thu Mk 12.28-34

The Lord says: I will give you a new heart. I will remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh. I shall put my Spirit in you.

Ezk 36.24-27

8 Fri Mk 12.41-44

The Lord says: You will know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and make you rise up from them.

Ezk 37.1-14

9 Sat Mk 3.31-35

The upright praise your holy name, Lord, for your Wisdom opened the mouths of the dumb, and enabled little children to speak.

Ws 10.20-21

10 SUN Ex 34.4-6, 8-9

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Jn 3.16-18

11 Mon Mt 5.1-12

Paul writes to Timothy: I remind you now to fan into a flame the gift God has placed in you. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of inward strength, of love and of self-control.

2 Tm 1.1-9

12 Tue 2 Tm 1.9-18

Jesus said to his disciples: You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden.

Mt 5.13-16

13 Wed 2 Tm 2.1-7

Jesus said: If you are bringing you offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering.

Mt 5.20, 23-24

14 Thu Lk 9.11-17

The children you love, Lord, will learn that it is not the crops of the earth that provide nourishment, but your word that supports all who believe in you.

Ws 16.20-21, 26

15 Fri 2 Tm 2.14-25

Jesus said: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

Mt 5.43-48

16 Sat 2 Tm 3.10-17

Jesus said: When you give, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your generosity is secret. And your Father, who sees all that is done in secret, will reward you.

Mt 6.1-4

17 SUN 1 Co 10.16-17

Jesus said: I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.

Jn 6.51-58

18 Mon Mt 6.5-6

Paul writes: I have fought the good fight to the end. I have run the race to the finish. I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord will give me.

2 Tm 4.1-8

19 Tue 2 Tm 4.16-22

Jesus said: Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Mt 6.7-15

20 Wed 1 K 17.7-16

Jesus said: Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too.

Mt 6.16-21

21 Thu 1 K 17.17-24

Jesus said: Do not worry about your life. Seek first God's kingdom and his saving justice.

Mt 6.25-34

22 Fri Mt 7.1-5

When Elijah was discouraged, an angel of God touched him and said, "Get up and eat, or the journey will be too long for you." So he got up and ate and drank, and, strengthened by that food, he walked until he reached the mountain of God.

1 K 19.3-8

23 Sat Mt 7.7-11

On the Mount Sinai, Elijah heard God's voice in a breath of silence.

1 K 19.9-13a

24 SUN Ac 13.22-26

ST JOHN THE BAPTIST
Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, prophesied: You, little child, will be called Prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare a way for him.

Lk 1.57-80

25 Mon Hos 2.16-22

Jesus said: Whoever listens to my words and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on rock.

Mt 7.24-29

26 Tue Mt 8.5-10

Let us strive to know the Lord; that he will come is as certain as the dawn. He will come to us like the rain of springtime upon the earth.

Hos 6.2-6

27 Wed Hos 11.1-4

Jesus healed all the sick, fulfilling what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: He bore our sicknesses away and carried our diseases.

Mt 8.14-17

28 Thu Hos 11.7-9

Jesus said: Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

Mt 8.18-22

29 Fri Ac 12.1-11

SS PETER AND PAUL
Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do people say I am?" "Some say John the Baptist," they answered, "some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But you," he said, "who do you say I am?" Peter spoke up and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Mt 16.13-19

30 Sat Mt 9.1-8

The Lord says: I will cure my people of their disloyalty, I shall love them with all my heart. I hear them and watch over them.

Hos 14.2-9

Johannine Hours

John 15.26-27

Johannine hours are suggested as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer, in the midst of our life at home. During the course of the day take a couple of hours to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow.

Afterwards, the group (3 to 10 people) meet together to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

As well as believing in Christ, am asked to believe in his Spirit. If I believe in the Spirit, then I believe in that which the Spirit achieves not only in others but also in me. There's no more room for being pessimistic about myself. Would I know how to love with the selfless love that the Gospel invites? Isn't my selfishness too strong? Am I not going to come across it continually masked in my seemingly best intentions? Shared by these questions, some people wear themselves out trying to prove to themselves that a new life has started within them.

Being able to see, feel, experience emotionally that the Spirit lives in me is not asked of me. What is asked is that I believe in the Holy Spirit, that I trust in him, that I abandon myself to him. Far from being yet another requirement, this call to faith sets us free. Yes, joyful renunciations do exist. Am I really able to love? do not know, I accept not to know and give up the desperate attempts to assure myself of it. I will take seriously the promise of Christ: "I will not leave you as orphans" (Jn. 14.18).

The Gospel does not forget human limitations. However, wants to substitute trust in the Holy Spirit for the worry which they produce. In this way, I can have the courage to be myself. From this moment onwards I can start to live out the little that I have understood of Christ. My words though they may seem clumsy can be uttered to express my faith. My actions and words will come from me; an Other, without me knowing how, will enable them to be a reflexion of Christ. And it is precisely what is best them that will probably escape my sight.

How does trust in the Holy Spirit give me the courage to be a witness of Christ and to be myself?

“Lord, teach us to pray”

This is the last of the bible introductions on the Our Father which were given by a brother of the community each morning. The participation in the Bible Group, a week during which some Bible texts are looked at in a deeper manner, is one of the choices offered to young people during the inter-continental meetings.

“Enable us not to fall into temptation, but deliver us from Evil.”

After having spoken about a life of communion with God rooted in forgiveness, the Our Father goes on to speak of evil, suffering and the inner trial. These last phrases are among the most difficult to understand. It is not only a question of translations. The original Greek means “Do not lead us into temptation.” How can we understand this? The modern English translation makes the verb stronger causing even more difficulties; “Do not bring us...”. We are well in our rights to ask ourselves why a God who is our “Abba”, our loving Father, who wants to show us the way to a life in fulness, should want to lead us into temptation or even a time of trial.

In order to understand the meaning of this verb, Bible commentators willingly refer to the Hebrew or Aramaic, the language in which Christ spoke this prayer. The original construction can be understood in two ways. Firstly, the way in which the Greek has been conveyed. Secondly, with a lot of grammatical justification, the following: “Enable us not to fall...”. This interpretation can also be explained by the words of Christ to the disciples in Gethsemane: “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation” (Mt 26.41). This is what we do when we pray the Our Father.

What is the reality described by the words “temptation” and “trial”? The former has taken a moral significance, the latter is linked with “torment” or “suffering”. In order to understand the biblical meaning, we must return to the desert with the people of Israel. The experience of “trials” was part of the pilgrimage towards the Promised Land. It was always a trial or test of faith, of trust in God.

For example, because of the lack of water in the desert, the people want to return to Egypt and ask: “Is the Lord among us, or not?” (Ex 17.1-7). Faced with a people losing trust, Moses cries out to God: “What should I do?”. God shows him the rock from which water will flow out. The trial in which the people almost lost the meaning of their relationship to God becomes for Moses and the believer, in an unexpected way, a step forward.

In the Gospel, Jesus too comes face to face with Temptation in the desert. The Tempter does his best to break the trust of Jesus in God. And it is there that the struggle lies for each person, when a voice is heard suggesting a picture of happiness that does not come from God.

When the Bible seems to say that trials come from God, it is an abridgement. God calls us to follow him and to leave behind our securities in order to walk with him in the desert. There, in one way or another, our trust in him will be put to the test. But saying that God wants that we should suffer, or, even more, that we should fall into the trap of the Tempter and leave the path, would be the worst of misinterpretations. God wants exactly the opposite for us - life in fulness. Through trust in him, and with his help, he wants us to be able to pass through all difficulties and finally reach perfect communion with him.

A passage from the letter of James shows us the two dimensions of a trial, one after the other. “Happy the man who stands firm when trials come. He has proved himself, and he will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. No-one should say, when tempted, “God has sent the temptation”; God cannot be tempted to do anything wrong, and he does not tempt anyone. Everyone who is tempted is tempted and seduced by his own wrong desires” (Js 1.12-14).

When we pray, “enable us not to fall into temptation”, we are not asking to be spared from every difficult situation. We entrust ourselves to the love of God which will give us the strength to pass through the trial. God will always be present showing us the way through, a way which is not often obvious beforehand, but which becomes apparent at the given moment.

Among the last words spoken by Jesus to his disciples in the John’s Gospel, we find the following promise: “I have told you all these things so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but have courage! I have conquered the world”. As the Passion draws near, when he was surrounded by violence and hatred, Jesus speaks of this peace which we find in him alone. His love, and the strength of his forgiveness, are stronger than Evil. With trust, and already in the joy of the Ressurection, we can say in communion with all of humanity: “Deliver us from Evil”.

Christ says to the disciples in Gethsemane: “Watch and pray, so that you will not fall into temptation.”

And this is indeed what we are doing when we pray the Our Father.



Listening to the CONTINENTS

United States

On the Mexican border

"On our arrival in McAllen, a small town in the United States on the border with Mexico, we heard the news of the opening of the Berlin wall. The people said to us; "Now this border should be opened!" Suddenly, we were confronted with the contrast between two different worlds and with the difficult question of immigrants. The Rio Grande rolls on, a frontier which those who come from the south try to cross at any cost, wanting to live and to assure the survival of their families. Those who manage to cross often find their first haven in a church, which then assures them a relative protection by finding them a place to stay.

The refugees who are arrested by the border guards whilst crossing the river are taken to internment camps. We went to one of these camps, as someone had obtained authorisation for us to visit and pray with those who wanted to. The prisoners, who are in no way criminals, roam on the vast open spaces closed off by iron mesh. We brought with us the icon of the cross and went first of all into the zone for women. Their faces expressed both their kindness and their worries. We could sense the difficult questions they had to mull over. Children and family life count so much in the Latin American culture. What would their lives be now? They stayed for a long time around the icon of the cross, kneeling on the concrete floor. In the other zone, there were many men, very young for the most part. These faces bore the marks of many tribulations, but above all they radiated a kind of innocence. It was the innocence of a simple human life, lived without ulterior motives and full of hope.

HIS LOVE IS A FIRE

Central writings with extracts from journals

Brother Roger of Taizé

For the first time, brings together in one volume the essential themes of Brother Roger's writing, including central texts and extracts from journals written over a span of many years.

Inner life and human solidarity for Brother Roger have one single source: the love of Christ, a fire which burns into the nights of humanity, a fire which never dies away.

Under the roof, in the warm wind and to the sound of announcements on the loudspeakers, the people crowded around the cross in silence. Their spontaneous gestures of veneration expressed well their origins. They sang with us. After the prayer, they asked all kinds of questions. The simple fact of being there plunged us headlong into a mystery of communion. We did not have anything to give, we could not do anything, yet it was the start of a kind of healing. When we left, two of them, wearing the regulation orange outfit, respectfully carried the icon of the cross in procession as far as the exit. ■

Haiti

"How I love freedom!"

A young teacher from Port-au-Prince writes: A few days ago, a ten year old child said to me: "How I love freedom!" I was a little astonished to hear such words coming from the lips of a child so young and asked him what freedom meant for him. He replied; "Freedom is when no-one is killed in the streets, when thieves do not come into our homes, when things are not too expensive for everyone to find food, when all the children have the chance to find the books needed for school."

In our local church community, one question always comes back: How can we live out the hope of Easter Sunday in a situation where Good Friday seems to go on for ever. Among the poorest of the poor, so many reflect this hope! A Eucharist was organised to give thanks for the liberation of some political prisoners. The church was vibrant and already joy was coming back. ■

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